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**Joint Task Force - Bravo:
The U.S. Military Presence in Honduras
U.S. Policy for an Evolving Region**

by

Scott M. Hines

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Executive Summary

In a post-Cold War period of shrinking defense budgets, bottom up reviews, and a general down sizing of U.S. defense forces, the Department of Defense has begun to take a realistic look at its defense needs, and size its base force accordingly. One result, is that the United States has begun to close many of its overseas bases and posts, concentrating on agile, flexibly trained forces for power projection abroad. The U.S. Southern Command (Quarry Heights, Panama) maintains a small presence at a Honduran base known as Soto Cano AB. Previously called Palmerola, this Honduran facility is home to U.S. Joint Task Force - Bravo (JTF-B), originally established in 1984 to counter the regional Soviet destabilization in Nicaragua. With the end of the Cold War and the Central American wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador, JTF-B's main mission is now to coordinate the deployment of troops to the region for training. There is concern however, that the role JTF-B plays in the region is not worth the \$22 million it costs to maintain the facility.

This paper compares and contrasts the benefits and shortcomings of two policy options. The criteria used fall into four main categories: 1) costs 2) economic impact on Honduras 3) U.S. and Honduran political ramifications and 4) contribution to regional military objectives. Option 1 examines a continued presence of U.S. forces in Honduras, assessing the cost of JTF-B, the current impact on the local economy, political implications of a continued presence, and contributions to regional objectives. Option 2 examines the departure of U.S. troops from Soto Cano, assessing cost savings, political ramifications, economic impacts, and implications for regional objectives.

This paper recommends the United States withdraw its forces from Honduras in the near future. The recommendation is based on the conclusion that JTF-B does not have a significant impact on regional stability, is potentially a political problem between U.S. and Honduran governments, and unnecessarily costs the U.S. taxpayer millions of dollars.

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Introduction:

In a post-Cold War period of shrinking defense budgets, bottom up reviews, and a general down sizing of U.S. defense forces, the Department of Defense has begun to take a realistic look at its defense needs, and size its base force accordingly. These assessments evaluate threats to U.S. security and examine certain peacetime requirements of the U.S. Armed Forces. As a result, the United States has begun to close many of its overseas bases and posts, concentrating on agile, flexibly trained forces for power projection abroad.

Although much attention has been given to U.S. troop reductions in Europe, the Department of Defense (DoD) has also begun to evaluate the need for a U.S. presence in other regions of the world, among them Latin America. The United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), the regional unified command based in Panama, has nineteen South and Central American countries in its area of responsibility. USSOUTHCOM's personnel are predominantly stationed in Panama, with one exception -- a small Honduran air base, approximately fifty miles west of the capital Tegucigalpa.¹

Soto Cano Air Base, previously known as Palmerola AB, is home to Joint Task Force - Bravo (JTF-B), a small unit of approximately 800 to 1200 Air Force, Army and U.S. government personnel.²

¹ The presence at Soto Cano is a temporary one. It is unique in that there is no base leasing agreement with the Honduran government, or plans to negotiate U.S. basing rights in the future. The U.S. presence is granted by the express permission of the Honduran government, and regulated by a series of Protocols negotiated in the 1980s.

² The number of personnel stationed at JTF-B fluctuates depending on current exercises being conducted in Honduras and the region. The vast majority of those at SCAB are on temporary duty (TDY) for three to six months, thus there is a constant turnover of personnel, almost on a weekly basis. Also, USSOUTHCOM is presently downsizing its force at SCAB. Current estimates are unclear, but seem to rest at approximately 800 personnel. Based on the 1994 JTF-B Command Briefing, JTF-B is composed of approximately five groups: 700 Army personnel, 150 Air Force personnel, 90 medical personnel, 225 personnel in the 228th aviation regiment and nearly 600 civilian contracts (mostly foreign national). There is also a handful of U.S. Customs agents based at Soto Cano.

JTF-B headquarters, directly subordinate to USSOUTHCOM, is organized like a unified command as it has directorates to support daily operations, and assigned Army and Air Force components. The headquarters, supporting units, and personnel barracks are connected by about ten miles of predominantly gravel roads and are located on nearly 300 acres of land surrounding an airfield capable of supporting the largest military planes in the U.S. inventory. The mission of JTF-B is:

To exercise operational control of all U.S. military forces in Central America; act as U.S. Commander-in-Chief Southern Command's (USCINCSO) directive authority in logistics; be the coordinating authority in Honduras on engineering functions; be prepared to conduct search, air, and rescue (SAR) missions and most recently, to assist the Honduran government in counter-drug actions in cooperation with other U.S. and host nation agencies.³

Soto Cano, is used by the Honduran Armed Forces (HAF) as a pilot training base and home to their Air Force Academy.

With the end of the Cold War came the end of Soviet supported insurgent wars in Central America, specifically in Nicaragua and El Salvador. JTF-B is one of the last vestiges of the U.S. military presence in the region, originally intended to counter the Soviet threat. However, as a regional coordination center for U.S. military training and exercises, as well as a forward presence in the drug war, JTF-B now represents a different approach for the U.S. military, one of high readiness, peacetime engagement and non-traditional roles. Still, the question remains whether or not a U.S. military presence of 1,200 people is needed in Honduras to fulfill U.S. policy objectives in the Central American region. More specifically, should DoD continue to spend approximately \$22 million dollars annually to maintain this sizable presence in Honduras? This question is important for several reasons. First, the Clinton administration is still forming its foreign policy for the region, thus the question of maintaining a military presence in Honduras is both timely and substantive. Second, Central America

³ "Joint Task Force-Bravo: Fact Sheet." (USSOUTHCOM, Quarry Heights Panama: August 20, 1993).

epitomizes fledgling democracies, and according to Les Aspin:

The spread of democracy around the world supports U.S. security and fosters global stability and prosperity that can benefit all peoples. When democracy falters in key nations, it can have a major impact on America's national security interest and our military needs.⁴

Thus, JTF-B's role in the development of these democracies should be considered. Third, according to the Defense Department, "The first priority of the Clinton-Aspin defense plan is to ensure that the United States has forces ready to fight today and into the future. We face the even more difficult challenge of having to preserve the readiness of our forces as we reduce the defense budget."⁵ Because JTF-B is heavily involved in the coordination of military readiness training exercises, its existence should be seriously evaluated. Finally, with the departure of all U.S. forces on December 31, 1999 from Panama, JTF-B's continuance becomes an important consideration should the U.S. wish to maintain a forward military presence in Latin American.

This paper considers two policy options: 1) With the approval of the Government of Honduras, keep JTF-B at Soto Cano indefinitely, continuing all or most of the present missions. 2) Withdraw the U.S. military presence at Soto Cano, continuing some of the missions from Continental U.S. (CONUS) locations or by other means. Because USSOUTHCOM has abandoned many of the missions from the 1980s, JTF-B cannot eliminate any more missions and still function, due to its interdependent joint nature. Also, the relevant criteria deal little with issues related to reduced operations. Therefore, an option considering a diminished presence with fewer missions will not be considered in this paper.

The analysis in this paper is based on public publications, statements made during unclassified

⁴ Statement by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. March 30, 1993. As cited in the USSOUTHCOM Strategy briefing, January 1994.

⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense. Defense Bottom Up Review Plan. Released on September 1, 1993.

conferences, unclassified USSOUTHCOM and JTF-B internal memorandum and briefings, and the author's unclassified background interviews conducted over a seven-month period in 1993 and early 1994. The interviews took place in the United States, Panama, and Honduras. The research is partially limited due to the classified nature of some interviews and documents. Also, the inherent bureaucratic biases of those interviewed has been taken into account.

After careful analysis, it is the recommendation of the author that the United States withdraw its presence in Honduras, continuing some of the current missions from CONUS locations or by other means. This recommendation is based on the following:

- 1) A withdrawal of forces will save the DoD \$22 million annually in overseas expenditures.
- 2) JTF-B's economic impact on the Comayagua region is moderate, and will be assumed by the growth of Chinese investment in the region.
- 3) Withdrawal of U.S. forces is a politically acceptable option if managed correctly.
- 4) Current missions are obsolete or can be accomplished without JTF-B:
 - Drug interdiction assistance is of little use.
 - Logistical coordination can be done by U.S. Military Groups (USMilGP).
 - Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve Training can continue in the region and in Honduras without the presence of JTF-B, although at a marginally higher cost.
 - Professionalization of HAF is done primarily by USMilGP, and other DoD programs. JTF-B's contribution is minimal.
 - Little need for intelligence collection.
 - JTF-B contributes little to the stability of the region.
 - Contingency planning does not require JTF-B.
 - Deploying assets from Panama is not a feasible option considering GOH plans to convert Soto Cano into an international airport.

Withdrawing the U.S. military presence from Honduras does not mean that the U.S. should abandon its commitment to the young democracies in Central America. There are a variety of means the United States can employ to foster a continued development in the region. The U.S. military can still be involved in nation building, professionalization and training of the militaries in the region as well

as play a limited role in the drug war. The conclusion of this analysis is that JTF-B contributes little to any of these efforts. Furthermore, in the event of a contingency, the U.S. is capable of responding without maintaining a forward base in Honduras. Thus, the DoD can cut the money spent each year maintaining Soto Cano AB.

Historical Evolution of the Issue

As early as 1965, Honduran Armed Forces and the U.S. military were conducting combined joint training exercises with each other. However, by the early 1980s, the frequency and size of these exercises began to increase in the face of a militarizing Nicaragua and an unstable El Salvador.⁶ In the Spring of 1982, Honduras approached the U.S. government and began negotiations which granted the U.S. access to Honduran naval and air facilities. By June of 1983, the U.S. had established the Regional Military Training Center, a facility run by U.S. special forces to train friendly countries in basic counter-insurgency tactics.⁷ That same year, USSOUTHCOM established JTF-11, later designated JTF-Alfa, deploying about 4,500 personnel to train in Honduras as a show of force along the Nicaraguan border. After winning approval from the U.S. Congress to establish a "temporary but indefinite" presence in Honduras, JTF-Alfa was re-named JTF-Bravo in 1984.

The Threat

By 1984, U.S intelligence estimated that since 1979, at least \$300 million had been expended on military construction by the Soviets in Nicaragua. The biggest concern was an airstrip at Punta Huete, the longest in Central America and able to accommodate the largest aircraft in the Soviet

⁶ "History of Joint Task Force - Bravo (July 1989-July 1990)." (USSouthCom Publication, Quarry Heights, Panama: 1990).

⁷ "U.S. Relations with Honduras and Nicaragua." (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington D.C. : March 28, 1984).

inventory.⁸ Even more alarming were statements made by the Sandinista leadership about supporting "a revolution without borders" in Central America.⁹ Beginning in 1981-1982, Honduras was struck by a wave of terrorist and subversive attacks. "In the late spring and early summer of 1983, most Hondurans were convinced that their country was going to be attacked. It was in response to this sense of threat, this deep insecurity, that the President [Reagan] made the decision to increase U.S. military presence in the region."¹⁰ One main objective was to build up the HAF, considering that their forces comprised about one fourth that of the Nicaraguan military.

Another important objective, perhaps the predominant motivation for U.S. involvement, was to counter the Soviet threat in the region. In requesting funding from Congress to upgrade Honduran airfields and ports, it was argued that "though modest, the construction program also has a definite impact on the Sandinistas and their Cuban and Soviet supporters. The message is that the United States is making a commitment in the region and will be able to respond to crisis situations which may arise because of Communist-supported subversion."¹¹ It was determined, however, that in order to respond to such a "crisis" the United States would need access to tactical airfields in Honduras, as

⁸ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Military Construction Appropriations for 1985: Hearings on Military Construction Appropriations. Hearing before the Committee on Appropriations. March 7, 1984. 8-9.

⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Caribbean Basin Program. Hearings before the Subcommittee for Military Construction. March 24, 1983. 196.

¹⁰ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Military Construction Appropriations for 1985: Hearings on Military Construction Appropriations. Hearing before the Committee on Appropriations. March 7, 1984. 8.

¹¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Central American, Persian Gulf, and Pacific Construction Programs. Hearings before the Subcommittee for Military Construction. March 26, 1987. 10.

other U.S. assets like Guantanamo Bay, were too far away.¹²

Congress:

In 1983, Congress appropriated \$13 million to upgrade the airfield at Palmerola AB, Honduras (later re-named Jose Enrique Soto Cano AB by the Hondurans). At the time, USSOUTHCOM and State Department officials testified the appropriations would only be spent to "strengthen a field that they [HAF] operate so that it will have the capability of supporting American aircraft that might be needed in time of trouble."¹³ USSOUTHCOM also testified they had no intention of stationing U.S. troops at Palmerola, but that the USMilGP would be tasked with insuring that the facilities were maintained.¹⁴ Construction was completed by June 1983, extending the runway to 8,500 feet. By 1984, USSOUTHCOM had established a 100 man aviation unit (helicopters) at Palmerola, and had constructed a small tent city with a dining facility and living quarters.¹⁵ It was justified as a "temporary unit" for short term deployments. By 1987, this unit grew to over 1,000 personnel, all assigned to JTF-B on short term temporary duties (a tour of over four weeks but less than twenty-six weeks), a unique characteristic that JTF-B maintains even today. Between FY87 and FY88, Congress appropriated another \$7 million for upgrades to billeting, dining, recreation, and medical facilities as well as runway and aircraft parking improvements. It was during this time frame the JTF-B operating

¹² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Caribbean Basin Program. Hearings before the Subcommittee for Military Construction. March 24, 1983. 192.

¹³ Ibid., 193.

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Caribbean Basin Program. Hearings before the Subcommittee for Military Construction. April 20, 1982. 33, 336.

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Military Construction Appropriations for 1985: Hearings on Military Construction Appropriations. Hearing before the Committee on Appropriations. March 7, 1984. 81-82.

budget swelled to almost \$25 million dollars annually, remaining at that level until 1993.¹⁶ When asked by a House committee member in 1987 how much longer USSOUTHCOM anticipated keeping troops in Honduras, General Galvin, then USSOUTHCOM Commander-in-Chief, responded:

We will remain in Honduras only as long as it serves our mutual interests. When the Sandinistas in Nicaragua cease being a threat to the true democracies in the region, then I am sure that we and the Hondurans will seek to phase out the United States military presence.¹⁷

Congress did not forget statements like this. Over the last decade there has been a conscious oversight from Hill in order to assure the temporary nature of JTF-B.¹⁸

Recent Evaluations

Beginning in 1990, elements of the Executive Branch began to question the continued need for a military presence in Honduras. With the peace accords in El Salvador underway and the democratic election of President Violetta Chamorro in Nicaragua, much of the original justification for JTF-B's presence seemed to have evaporated. Members of the US Ambassador's country team (Honduras) met in 1990 to discuss the issue, and concluded that JTF-B was needed to "manage the mop up in Nicaragua," serve as a counter-drug platform, and retain the option for future contingencies.¹⁹ Also in 1990, an interagency policy coordinating committee (PCC) met at the State Department to examine

¹⁶ "Honduras: U.S. Military Presence at Soto Cano Air Base." United States General Accounting Office. Briefing Report to the Chairman Subcommittee on Military Construction, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate. March 1989. 18.

¹⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Central American, Persian Gulf, and Pacific Construction Programs. Hearings before the Subcommittee for Military Construction. March 26, 1987. 11.

¹⁸ For example, JTF-B was not allowed to install a central air conditioning unit in its barracks. Instead, they were authorized to install individual window coolers (considered more "temporary").

¹⁹ Telephone Interview with Ambassador Crecensio Arcos. U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C.: January 10, 1994.

JTF-B's future role. There was great disagreement about the issue, with State Department officials concerned about the military presence and DoD officials vehemently defending it. As a result of the PCC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) sent a tasker to USSOUTHCOM, the first of many, requesting mission statements, support requirements, manpower estimates, and future roles estimates.²⁰ This inquiry began an internal DoD evaluation that is ongoing today - trying to determine if JTF-B should remain in Honduras, and if so, what size should it be and what missions should it perform?

The Policy Problem in a Broader Context:

Although the threat of communism taking root in Central America is greatly diminished, there still remains many non-traditional threats to democracy in the region - threats that put U.S. policy interests at risk.²¹ These include narco-trafficking, ongoing insurgencies, widespread poverty, depressed economies, and military institutions resistant to civilian authority: all of which jeopardize stability and the continuing development of democracy.²² Simply stated, the U.S. should work to counter these threats while expanding on the opportunities that exist in Central America. It is within this broader context that the issue of continuing a U.S. military presence in Honduras should be considered. According to Colonel Robert Killebrew, former JTF-B Commander, "You can't deal with

²⁰ Taskers reviewed at USSOUTHCOM Headquarters, Quarry Heights, Panama. August 93.

²¹ Perhaps the greatest policy interest of the United States is stability in the region. Without this, it is difficult to consider other agendas such as improving human rights, professionalizing militaries, increasing U.S. trade and investments, etc. Also, one must realize that the United States, after roughly two hundred years of democracy, tends to project the U.S. democratic experience as the standard for Latin America, forgetting to consider the different historical experiences in the Western Hemisphere.

²² It is a difficult task to generalize common problems in such a diverse region. For example, the democracies of Belize and Costa Rica are not normally considered to be as fragile as other Central American countries such as Nicaragua or El Salvador. Also, Costa Rica does not have a national military. However, in attempting to generalize, the threats listed seem the most common as well as most serious problems in Central America.

Palmerola in a vacuum - you have to deal with it as a part of the policy for the region."²³

Democracy in Latin America:

For the first time in the history of Central and South America, there is some form of democracy in each of the nineteen countries. This is very encouraging considering that, according to U.S. policy, "We in the United States believe that our own national well-being is linked to the successful consolidation of democracy and the emergence of genuine prosperity through-out Latin America."²⁴ Unfortunately, the democracies range in stability, with those in Central America among the weakest. Although essentially the U.S. system of democracy, what is developing is "democracy by default," "delegative democracy" or "low intensity democracy." In other words, although the "governments derive their initial mandate from popular election" there is a temptation to "govern above parties, legislatures, courts, interest groups or the organizations of civil society."²⁵ Primarily for this reason democracy remains fragile, its legitimacy still developing in many of these countries. Thus, it is important to consider how the U.S. military presence in Honduras contributes or detracts from the development of democracy in Central America.

Narco-trafficking

Narco-trafficking in the Central American region has grown just as steadily as the production of drugs in South America. It is estimated by USSOUTHCOM that 1,300 to 3,000 flights, and 3,000

²³ Douglas Farah. "The Lost Decade; Central America is staggering under its' 80's legacy." Washington Post National Weekly Edition. June 14-20, 1993. 9.

²⁴ Lawrence S. Eagleburger. "An Agenda to Promote Inter-American Cooperation." Current Policy No. 1283. United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs: Washington D.C. June 5, 1990.

²⁵ Abraham F. Lowenthal. "Latin America: ready for Partnership? From the Lost Decade to a New Boom." Foreign Affairs; the Year Ahead. (Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. vol 72, No. 1, 1993) 83.

to 5,000 ships a year transport drugs through Central America and the Caribbean to the United States.²⁶ This influx of drugs in the region brings with it increased crime and wide-scale corruption to the public sectors of these countries. Because of legal restrictions, the U.S. military is not allowed to participate directly in counter-drug operations. Leadership in this arena is primarily in the hands of the Host Nation, with any military support coordinated through U.S. embassies. USSOUTHCOM's counter-drug mission is "to provide resources, training, intelligence and operational support through the U.S. Ambassador to Host Nations in the Theater to combat drug production and trafficking, and reduce or eliminate the flow of illegal drugs into the United States."²⁷ The Clinton Administration has shifted emphasis away from interdiction missions ("bees") to eradication ("beehive") missions. Thus, the counter-drug campaign of the United States is now more focused on the drug producing countries of South America rather than the transshipment region of Central America.²⁸

Economic Situation

Another threat to democracy in the region is impaired economies and wide-scale poverty. "Despite large sums of U.S. economic and military aid [in the 1980s] - about \$5 billion to El Salvador, \$2 billion to Honduras, hundreds of millions to the Contras, and \$674 million for postwar construction in Nicaragua - living standards in the three countries are lower today than they were at the end of the 1970s."²⁹ The poverty rate in all of these countries has steadily risen, and the national infrastructures

²⁶ USSOUTHCOM After Action Report, "Southern Cone Counter-drug Conference." July 16-18, 1991.

²⁷ USCINCSO Counter-drug Campaign Plan Information Briefing. Quarry Heights, Panama. August 1993

²⁸ Interview with Max Pooley. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Director, U.S. Embassy Honduras: Tegucigalpa, January 18, 1994. This is not to say that interdiction missions have ceased - only that emphasis has shifted to eradication.

²⁹ Douglas Farah. "The Lost Decade; Central America is staggering under its' 80's legacy." Washington Post National Weekly Edition. June 14-20, 1993. 4.

are old and dilapidated. These conditions spell trouble for democracy as economic reality continues to fall short of people's expectations. In an effort to circumvent this threat, USSOUTHCOM has become increasingly involved in a variety of nation assistance efforts, mostly using military assets to improve and teach infrastructure repair and health maintenance standards throughout the region. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has spent billions in the region to assist these countries with a variety of diverse projects. Other benevolent organizations, like the Peace Corps., have made great contributions as well.

The Militaries of Central America

Another hindrance to the strengthening of democracy in these countries is strong military institutions, long the political arbiters of society, who tend to resist relinquishing power to civilian institutions.³⁰ "Military leadership for the most part has withdrawn from governing, but in no case have they surrendered the capacity nor given up the constitutional right to intervene in governing should they judge necessary."³¹ Also, in many cases, "civilian institutions have not programmed nor provided adequate resources for the military. The military's response has been to provide for itself - through commercial and military business enterprises, private pension funds, and/or corruption."³² Recently, Host Nation militaries have been faced with the dilemma of releasing some power to promote democratic development, or maintaining power and decelerating the process. Through

³⁰ Many of the constitutions of these countries recognize the military as the guarantors of "peace, public order, and the rule of the Constitution." See Constitution of the Republic of Honduras (1982) Article 272. However, some countries (i.e. El Salvador) are moving away from this and have deleted such wording.

³¹ David G. Bradford, LtCol. "The Southern Theater: U.S. Interests Still Matter Here." Strategic Review, Winter 1994, Vol. 22, No. 1, 44. LtCol Bradford is the former director of the J5 Strategy office, USSOUTHCOM.

³² Tim McMahon, LtCol, and David G. Bradford, LtCol. "Strategy Paper #5 - "The Role of Military Forces in Host Nation Democracies." USSOUTHCOM J5: Quarry Heights, Panama. April 27, 1992.

military-military contacts, USSOUTHCOM hopes to influence these militaries to decrease their role in society and submit to civilian authorities. JTF-B, with its many daily contacts with the Honduran Armed Forces, is one avenue for achieving this.

U.S. Foreign Aid and Security Assistance

Since the 1980s, U.S. military aid to Central America has decreased sharply. For example, in Honduras, security assistance funding peaked in the mid-1980's at around \$80 million a year. FY94 projections are for \$500,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds only (A summary of "Security Assistance to Honduras" can be found in Appendix B). The HAF interpret this as increasing disinterest by the United States in the region because of the Soviet exodus in Nicaragua.³³ Although partially correct, this decrease is also due to a world wide decrease in security assistance, and an oversized (although shrinking) HAF that has become entirely dependent on U.S. aid to conduct operations.³⁴ Regardless, JTF-B is a means for the U.S. military to stay "engaged" in Central America despite the decline in security assistance.

Although security assistance has dried up, other sources of foreign aid are still available to the region. The Clinton Administration has submitted a bill to Congress which would overhaul the nation's foreign assistance program. It will put stringent restrictions on which countries are eligible for aid based on broad policy objectives such as promoting democracy and human rights. Honduras should qualify for such aid, although after reviewing the administration's internal budget projections for FY95, critics are skeptical about how much money "will be available for these purposes, however

³³ Interview with military officers in the Honduran Army. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 10, 1994.

³⁴ Of course the size of the HAF is a direct result of United States military funding which made them one the largest and best equipped military in Central America. El Salvador's military is also very large.

high-minded the language."³⁵

U.S. Theater Objectives in Region

In gross figures, the USSOUTHCOM's area of responsibility covers 20 percent of the world's land mass, yet utilizes less than 1 percent of DoD resources. The Bottom Up review mentions Latin America only once stating the following:

In Latin America, our armed forces will help to promote and expand recent trends toward democracy and continue to work in concert with the armed forces and police in Latin American countries to combat drug traffickers. The United States will also retain a military presence in Panama acting as Panama's partner in operating and defending the Canal as we transition to full Panamanian control of the Canal in 1999.³⁶

Although the resources are few and a national military commitment to the region is not a priority for DoD, USSOUTHCOM's strategic planners developed a long-range vision for Latin America:

One of a community of free, stable and prosperous nations throughout the Western Hemisphere, acting in concert with one another, while respecting the dignity and rights of the individual and adhering to the principles of sovereignty and international law.³⁷

To accomplish this vision, USSOUTHCOM has developed a set of strategic objectives.

Although some official USSOUTHCOM documents espouse a separate set of objectives for Central America, the objectives are essentially identical to the overall Theater Strategic Objectives developed

³⁵ John M. Goshko and Thomas W. Lippman. "Foreign Aid Shift Sought by Clinton; Proposal Would Drop Friendly Nation Focus for Broad Goals." Washington Post. November 27, 1993.

³⁶ Office of the Secretary of Defense. Defense Bottom Up Review Plan. Released on September 1, 1993.

³⁷ David G. Bradford, LtCol and Jose A. Ciceraro, Tsgt and William A. Ward LtCol. "MEDRETE; A Critical Part of Nation Assistance." Military Review. March 1993. 36. This vision was first developed under the former USCINCSO, General Joulwan. The new USCINCSO, General McCaffery, has not publicly stated his long term vision, but it is assumed that it will be similar.

by the USSOUTHCOM strategy office.³⁸

USSOUTHCOM Theater Strategic Objectives

- 1) Strengthen democratic institutions
- 2) Assist Host Nations in eliminating threats to national/regional security
- 3) Support continued economic and social progress
- 4) Assist in defeating drug production and trafficking
- 5) Ensure an open and neutral Panama Canal
- 6) Enhance the roles of professional military forces in democratic societies

The implementation of these objectives is accomplished through 1) forward presence operations which demonstrate U.S. commitment and resolve and foster regional stability; and 2) peacetime engagement missions which include coordinated applications of political, economic, informational, and military means spanning all states of the operational continuum, focusing on underlying causes of the conflict.³⁹

Peacetime engagement operations have become the dominant type of military activity in the Southern Theater. They constitute a new, non-traditional military mission in which resources are the weapons used to carry out military policy. These resources include security assistance, counter-drug assistance, intelligence sharing, exercises and training deployments, humanitarian and civic assistance projects, expanded military relations and military education and training of host nation militaries.⁴⁰ In this context, USSOUTHCOM views JTF-B and Soto Cano AB as key elements of the strategic vision.

Panama 2000

³⁸ USSOUTHCOM Theater Strategy; Information Briefing. Quarry Heights, Panama. August 1993. This set of objectives was developed under General Joulwan. The new USCINCSO, General McCaffery has not changed the objectives at the time of writing of this paper.

³⁹ USCINCSO Peacetime Engagement OPLAN Information Briefing. Quarry Heights, Panama. August 1993.

⁴⁰ USSOUTHCOM Theater Strategy; Information Briefing. Quarry Heights, Panama. August 1993.

One final area when considering the policy issue in the broader context is the reversion of U.S. facilities back to the Panamanian government on December 31, 1999. The Panama Canal Treaties, signed September 7, 1977, grant the United States the right to defend the neutrality of the Canal beyond 1999, but requires that all U.S. bases and posts be relinquished at that time. Although some officials speculate the U.S. will negotiate a new treaty allowing a presence into the 21st century, this paper assumes this *will not* occur.⁴¹ This assumption is necessary because 1) without negotiations already underway, strategic planning must assume there will be no forward presence in Panama; and, 2) planners are considering moving some assets from Panama to Soto Cano AB and JTF-B, upon receiving permission from the Honduran government. Therefore, the feasibility of this redistribution of USSOUTHCOM assets should be analyzed in regard to considering a continued military presence in Honduras.

Critical Analysis

Considering the policy problem in this broader context, the following questions remain: Should the United States spend approximately \$22 million dollars a year to maintain a forward military presence in Honduras? What is this forward presence worth to the United States? Is JTF-B at Soto Cano AB vital in achieving U.S. theater objectives in the Central American region?⁴² Can regional military objectives be achieved as well or better without JTF-B?

Options

⁴¹ Interviews with the staff of the Center for Treaty Implementation at Albrook AFB, Panama. Sept 1, 1993. According to one member, "We are waiting to negotiate because we want to create the most favorable position for ourselves. Therefore, we are waiting for them to ask and waiting until the election is over in May 1994"

⁴² There is a distinction made in this analysis between "objectives" and "missions." The objectives in the region (listed on page 15) are held constant, while missions, the means to achieve these objectives, are variable and under close scrutiny.

Option 1: This option examines the status quo of continuing JTF-B operations at Soto Cano on a "temporary but indefinite" basis. This option assumes there is still a need for a presence in Honduras - a need that will continue beyond the year 2000. Specifically, this option takes a close look at the impact of JTF-B's current operations on USSOUTHCOM objectives in the region. The option is closely scrutinized for any negative impact on regional military objectives or the country of Honduras. In many ways it is the yardstick of comparison for Option 2.

Option 2: This option examines the Joint Task Force leaving Honduras sometime in the next two years.⁴³ It analyzes the impact of withdrawing forces on the region and Honduras specifically. The option presents ways to achieve regional objectives without a U.S. military presence in Honduras. Option 2 acknowledges that some missions performed by JTF-B will be discontinued or may be more expensive without a presence in Honduras.

Criteria

There are four main criteria, with some sub-criteria, that will be used to evaluate the two above options. The first is cost to the DoD. Cost criteria include current operating costs, expected future costs to maintain Soto Cano, and comparative costs to deploy for training without JTF-B in Honduras. The second criterion is the economic impact on the Honduran Department of Comayagua, the region where Soto Cano is located. Because JTF-B contributes a sizable amount of dollars to the local economy, the effects of a sudden withdraw should be considered within the normative framework of the broader policy context. The third criterion considers political forces and implications of each option to include Honduran perceptions, U.S. political support, and the effect on U.S.-Honduran relations. Finally, the fourth criterion will analyze the impact of both options on U.S. regional military objectives. Specifically, this criterion looks at USSOUTHCOM missions in the region such

⁴³ Two years is arbitrarily chosen as a reasonable time frame for the complete withdrawal of troops and equipment at a feasible pace.

as drug interdiction operations, nation building, and military professionalization efforts; applying them to each option's capability to implement these missions. Also, a comparison of the impact on the stability of the region will be considered by analyzing if JTF-B contributes to the political stability and security of the region.

Cost Analysis

Option 1: Compared to other overseas bases, including those in Panama, Soto Cano is a very economical base to operate and maintain. Even the military construction costs to build and upgrade the base initially were extremely inexpensive, comprising only one half of one percent of all military construction programs in 1987.⁴⁴

The actual cost to run JTF-B is difficult to calculate. Because JTF-B is a temporary facility, with temporary personnel, its funding comes from a variety of sources. Most recent budget profiles calculated by U.S. Army South (USARSO) comptroller and JTF-B Resource Management office state the following for FY92 and FY93:⁴⁵

	<u>FY92</u>	<u>FY93</u>
Base Operations	\$17.2M	\$15.4M
Aviation Support	\$ 4.9M	\$ 8.8M
Reimbursements	\$ 1.5M	\$ 1.7M
Panama Support	<u>\$ 1.8M</u>	<u>\$ 1.7M</u>
Total	\$23.9M	\$25.9M

Projections for FY94 estimate a decreased operating budget of \$16.5 million which reflects the recent

⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Central America, Persia Gulf, and Pacific Construction Programs. Hearings before the Subcommittee for Military Construction. March 26, 1987. 17.

⁴⁵ FY92 and FY93 (planned) are from USARSO Fact Sheet, DCS Resource Management. 28 July 1992. FY93 (actual) is from JTF-B Command Briefing 1992-93. It is unclear what figures make up this total. \$30.2M was labeled "Operating Costs."

decrease in personnel and mission support at JTF-B.⁴⁶ One additional cost that must be included is the TDY salaries of the personnel stationed at JTF-B. Although salaries are an expense that would be incurred regardless of where these personnel were stationed (CONUS or elsewhere), TDY per diem adds approximately \$17.50 a day to each salary. This costs the DoD approximately \$5.5 million dollars above the normal salaries in 1992.⁴⁷ Adding this to current \$16.5 million operating cost figures, it is estimated that JTF-B costs the taxpayer approximately \$22 million a year.

In considering the future costs of maintaining Soto Cano, the expense is expected to increase. Without discussing the obvious impact of inflation, several other trends will increase cost. First, although it does not seem likely in the near future, the Hondurans may ask the United States to pay rent for use of the base. In the 1990 PCC at the State Department, a fair price was estimated to be \$110,000 a year.⁴⁸ Also, resource competition in the area is raising utility prices, thus boosting operating expenses. With only one hydroelectric plant in the country, there is a general shortage of electricity throughout the region. Also, the influx of foreign investment in Comayagua is slowly squeezing the already limited resources even tighter. Therefore, JTF-B can expect significantly higher utility bills in the near term.⁴⁹

Option 2: By leaving Honduras, the DoD can save \$22 million a year. The expense to

⁴⁶ Telephone interview with LtCol Molave, JTF-B liaison to USSOUTHCOM, Albrook AFB, Panama. January 18, 1994. I do not know what figures make up this total.

⁴⁷ "JTF-B Command Briefing 1992-1993." Estimates include \$5.5 million for 858 temporary personnel and \$1.9 million for salaries of 442 personnel stationed there for one year at a time.

⁴⁸ This number seems extremely low. Although taking into account the economy of Honduras, one should estimate a much higher cost should the United States ever have to pay rent.

⁴⁹ Interview with Karen Milliken, Economic Officer. Economic Section, U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

operate JTF-B can be considered an opportunity cost since the money, primarily taken out of the Army Operating and Maintenance (O&M) funds, could be used elsewhere. The expense of withdrawing from Honduras, airlift to transport 800 personnel, construction costs to breakdown facilities, etc., is a negligible comparison with Option 1 since this will eventually happen at some point in the future. However, by choosing to leave at its own pace, the United States can set its own withdrawal schedule, slowly phasing out sections over a one or two year period. This is certainly more cost effective than a quick withdrawal should the GOH demand the U.S. leave "next month."

Option 2 may be more expensive in some ways however. Most importantly, the cost to train in Honduras will increase without JTF-B to support logistical operations. In the case of the National Guard, the primary trainers in Honduras, a great deal of money is saved in billeting costs, local contracting, and others areas due to the facilities at JTF-B. Other areas such as airlift and in-country aviation support also save units participating in exercises a great deal of money. This overall cost increase is very difficult to evaluate due to the fact that thousands of troops from hundreds of units, all with separate budgets, train in the region. Therefore, it suffices to say that a unit will have to pay more to train in Honduras without JTF-B.

Economic Impact on Comayagua

One of the regional objectives for Central America is to support economic and social development in each of the countries. USSOUTHCOM has argued that JTF-B's economic impact on the Comayagua region is substantial and that a withdrawal at this time would adversely affect the local economy.

Option 1: Estimates from various sources range from \$5 million to \$50 million a year that is infused into the local economy by JTF-B; however, the commonly recognized figure is somewhere

around \$11 million.⁵⁰ Most of this money goes to pay about 700 Honduran nationals, purchase food, mostly fruits and vegetables, and fuel purchases. More money is expected to go into the economy via those stationed there, due to a lifting of rules which previously restricted U.S. military members from leaving the base except on JTF-B sponsored sightseeing trips or official business. The current JTF-B Commander estimates approximately \$200,000 a month is exchanged for local currency, presumably adding another \$2.4 million to the local economy each year as troops patronize local businesses.⁵¹ This money is certainly beneficial to the Comayagua region, predominantly a rural area. Thus, from a normative perspective, it should be a consideration in this policy analysis, especially at a time when the United States is cutting aid to the region.

Option 2: If JTF-B leaves Soto Cano, the Comayagua region will suffer economically only in the short term (one to two years) but will prosper within a few years due to an enormous influx of Chinese investment in the region. Recent trends suggest that Comayagua is the new up-and-coming region in Honduras. According to U.S. Embassy analysts, Comayagua, although poor, is beginning to flourish by Honduran standards. With the predicted economic growth, one U.S. Embassy official remarked, "JTF-B will never be missed."⁵²

Most of this growth will come from Chinese *Maquiladoras* - or industrial parks. *Maquiladoras* are textile assembly plants which bring in raw materials to be assembled and exported to the United States. Current contracts will provide over 10,000 jobs in the next ten years, dwarfing the 700 jobs provided by JTF-B. One plant, "ZIP Comayagua," is scheduled to open this Spring

⁵⁰ Telephone interview with LtCol Molave, JTF-B liaison to USSOUTHCOM. Albrook AFB, Panama. January 18, 1994.

⁵¹ Figure was mentioned in a country team meeting at the U.S. Embassy, Honduras in December or November according to one high ranking Embassy official.

⁵² Interview with Karen Milliken, Economic Officer. Economic Section, U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

providing 2,500 jobs alone.⁵³ The only adverse effect of a JTF-B departure is that local wages will not be as competitive, and probably will be lower once the U.S. military leaves.⁵⁴

Also important is the Honduran government's plan to use Soto Cano as an international airport to export fruits, vegetables, and textiles to the United States.⁵⁵ This is mentioned for two reasons: 1) it will boost trade, and therefore wages, living standards, etc. and 2) the airport development plan has important implications for other criteria.

Political Impact

Option 1: The presence of JTF-B in Honduras is not the subject of heated debate in Washington D.C. at the moment. Although Congress was interested in the subject and involved in regulating the presence in the 1980s, mostly due to President Reagan's policy for the region, it has simply fallen by the wayside. This has happened for several reasons: 1) There are very few interest groups who lobby on Central American regional issues and those that do are frequently ignored;⁵⁶ 2) Soto Cano escapes the worldwide basing list because there is no formal basing rights agreement between the U.S. and Honduras. Therefore, in considering overseas base closures, JTF-B is regarded, at least on paper, as a TDY location, not a U.S. military base; and 3) USSOUTHCOM has successfully managed public knowledge of the base, and although it has never been a secret, the Command has

⁵³ Interview with Scott Taylor, USAID office, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 18, 1994.

⁵⁴ Interview with Karen Milliken, Economic Officer. Economic Section, U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

⁵⁵ See "Callejas announces in Comayagua: Palmerola will be an airport for exportation in 1993." El Heraldo. October 1, 1993.

⁵⁶ Interview with Colonel John A. Cope, Jr. Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University. Ft. Leslie J. McNair: Washington D.C. February 4, 1994.

avoided drawing attention to it.⁵⁷

This U.S. presence may become an issue in the near future however. The General Accounting Office (GAO) is presently working a follow-up audit to its 1989 report on the topic. Although the report has not been requested by a specific member of Congress, it is expected to generate some renewed interest. Undoubtedly, statements like former USCINCSO General Galvin's stating that "when the threat goes away, there is no need for a U.S. force presence in a place like Palmerola," will be recalled. Congressional critics will certainly ask why USSOUTHCOM has maintained a presence up to the present when JTF-B was specifically authorized to counter instability in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Also, some members of Congress, specifically those who have lost bases in their home districts due to Base Reduction and Consolidation (BRAC) evaluations, will be skeptical about the need to maintain a "base" in Honduras.

For the Hondurans, the issue is one that has maintained prominence in political circles, but in an historically positive context. According to U.S. Embassy political experts, "the U.S. military presence at Soto Cano is not a controversial issue with the Hondurans, except maybe for a few hard left academics and journalists in the country. Most regard the presence in Honduras as normal."⁵⁸ In a country where the armed forces and local vigilantes roam the streets with weapons, the remote presence of U.S. soldiers is simply accepted as "part of the scenery."⁵⁹

The administration of newly elected President Carlos Roberto Reina has yet to announce an official position, but recently the President publicly stated that "the presence of U.S. military troops

⁵⁷ Telephone interview with Ambassador Crecensio Arcos. U.S. Department of State. Washington D.C.: January 10, 1994.

⁵⁸ Interview with high ranking officials U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

in Honduras no longer makes sense."⁶⁰ Reina stated his hope to turn Palmerola into a regional U.S. DEA headquarters to combat drug trafficking in the region, but made no mention of the U.S. military. In late April 1994, Reina initiated a review of the original Military Assistance Treaty of 1954, the protocol that governs the original relationship between the militaries of Honduras and the United States.⁶¹ In January 1994, experts at the Embassy were confident that the Reina government would not ask for the U.S. to pay rent for Soto Cano, mostly because "they value the U.S. presence too much to jeopardize the relationship."⁶² However, Reina's recent statements may change all of that. The Honduran Armed Forces are of course very supportive of the U.S. presence for practical reasons, especially since security assistance funds have been reduced to almost nothing. The professional skills training the Honduran military receives via joint exercises with U.S. troops is even more important than it has been in the past.⁶³

Although it is still too early to tell, the recent Reina statement could translate into problems for the U.S. military. Many of the Honduran intellectual elite have been consistently cynical about the presence. According to Manual Gamero, editor of *El Tiempo* newspaper, "the United States is only interested in having their USS Honduras battleship and the rest does not matter."⁶⁴ This particular government could decide that JTF-B is a political liability for them. According to one U.S. political-military affairs expert, "As long as you are in another country, you are subject to the political whims

⁶⁰ "Reina says foreign troops no longer needed." PA1802211394, Hamburg DPA in Spanish, 1902 GMT. February 18, 1994. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).

⁶¹ "Officials Urge Review of Military Treaty With U.S." PA19094195794, Tegucigalpa La Tribuna in Spanish. April 20, 1994. Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Interview with military officers in the Honduran Army. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 10, 1994.

⁶⁴ Douglas Farah. "The Lost Decade; Central America is staggering under its 80s legacy." Washington Post National Weekly Edition. June 14-20, 1993. 7.

of that country. You are a hostage to their political situation."⁶⁵ The U.S. military may not have a problem with the Reina government, but these public statements should be taken seriously.

Option 2: A U.S. military withdrawal from Honduras will spark little interest politically in the United States. In fact, the exodus of U.S. troops from Honduras would seem to fit national trends of reductions in overseas military presence, and parallel the U.S. withdrawal in Panama.

The reaction in Honduras will be one of mixed emotions - regret on one hand, but understanding of U.S. domestic trends on the other. "The Hondurans are realistic enough to know that things are changing in the United States and that the old relationship of the 1980s has gone away for good. Soto Cano is simply a form of engagement with the United States."⁶⁶ Leaving Honduras is mostly symbolic for the Hondurans. It signals that the U.S. strategic interest in the region is changing - a signal that began with the decrease in security assistance. Although the Honduran government and the HAF will not be shocked if the U.S. military left, there would still be ramifications on the relationship. Many believe that once the U.S. leaves Soto Cano, it will be difficult to get back in should a regional emergency necessitate that (this issue is discussed in depth later in the paper).⁶⁷

Mostly, however, the absence of the U.S. military will not be felt politically in Honduras. According to a June 1993 Gallup poll, 81 percent of those surveyed with at least a secondary education level did not know what the U.S. military was doing in their country. Of those with a primary education, 20 percent did not even know the U.S. military was operating out of a base in

⁶⁵ Interview with Colonel John A. Cope Jr. Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University. Ft. Leslie J. McNair: Washington D.C. February 4, 1994.

⁶⁶ Interview with high ranking officials U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

⁶⁷ John Otis. "Honduras a foothold for the U.S. in the region." The Washington Times. March 29, 1992.

Honduras.⁶⁸ The reason for this is most of what is done by the U.S. military occurs in remote areas, and is unseen by the majority of the population in the concentrated urban areas, including the governmental elite. Therefore, although U.S. operations are quite beneficial from a humanitarian perspective, a U.S. departure would evoke little response from the government of Honduras.

Regional Objectives Achieved

USSOUTHCOM has portrayed JTF-B as an asset in Central America, serving to further regional and theater objectives. The following analysis evaluates this depiction.

Drug Interdiction Support Operations

In 1990, USCINCSO General George A. Joulwan declared counter-drug support operations the primary mission of JTF-B.⁶⁹ He hoped to make Soto Cano a regional coordination center for drug interdiction support operations. By 1992, it was clear that the other Central American countries were not going to cooperate, often taking a long period of time to approve overflight rights to U.S. aircraft based in Honduras.⁷⁰ Because of the time sensitivity of responding to drug tips, the effectiveness of the regional center was seriously impaired; however, counter-drug (CD) support to host nations still remains a part of the JTF-B mission statement.

Option 1: Because the U.S. counter-drug strategy has shifted from interdiction operations to eradication operations, most of the focus has shifted away from Central America to South America.⁷¹

⁶⁸ CID U.S. Gallup Poll - June 1993. Honduras, conducted by Gallup - Central America, San Jose, Costa Rica.

⁶⁹ This decision was made in response to pressure from U.S. Ambassador Arcos, the Honduran government, the OSD, and the JCS to respond to drug interdiction needs in the region.

⁷⁰ Interview with Max Pooley, Director of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Office. U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 18, 1994.

⁷¹ Interview with Army Central American Politico-Military Officer, U.S. Army Staff. Pentagon, Washington D.C. 12 October 1993.

Last year, JTF-B participated in only 10 to 15 operations in support of U.S. DEA operations in Honduras. The U.S. military in Honduras was not involved in any missions outside the country.⁷²

One of the biggest hindrances against a JTF-B counter-drug mission are federal laws which prohibit the U.S. military from becoming directly involved in CD operations. Military assets can only be used in direct support roles. For example, in Honduras, the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters based at Soto Cano cannot fly within one kilometer of known drug activity. Typically, the Blackhawks transport U.S. DEA agents to a location close to the anticipated bust, and drop them off with supplies and equipment such as motorcycles. The military cannot monitor and detect trafficking once the traffickers are inside the Honduran border. This function is usually passed off to U.S. Customs or U.S. DEA agents. Thus, the U.S. military plays a limited role in CD efforts in Central America.⁷³

What is helpful to the DEA is the actual presence of Soto Cano AB, though not necessarily JTF-B. Many times U.S. Customs planes from Corpus Christi or Panama come in and refuel at Soto Cano, decreasing flight time and saving money by using a U.S. government fuel source. Some DEA helicopters and fixed wing Citations are occasionally based at Soto Cano, and both the DEA and Customs are permitted to use billeting and other facilities at JTF-B.⁷⁴

Option 2: Because the U.S. military is only minimally involved in CD support operations in Honduras, the absence of JTF-B would not be detrimental to the CD operations in the region. U.S. DEA aviation assets could be based at other Honduran airfields like La Ciba or San Pedro Sula, but the cost will go up for these agencies because they will not be able to take advantage of JTF-B facilities. Also, U.S. DEA and U.S. Customs will most likely be allowed to land and refuel at Soto

⁷² Interview with Max Pooley, Director of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Office. U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 18, 1994.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Cano, whether JTF-B is there or not. In the end, there is little future for an effective U.S. CD military role in Honduras unless U.S. laws restricting military participation are loosened and regional cooperation improves enough to allow cross border activity.

Logistics Coordination

Option 1: The JTF-B mission statement lists the Joint Task Force as, "USCINCSO's directive authority in logistics." This means that Soto Cano has become a regional logistics coordination center, supporting not only exercises in the region, but also regional USMilGPs, Embassies, and remote sites in Honduras. Most logistical supplies, everything from spare parts to food stocks, come down from the United States to Panama on Air Force C-5 Galaxies.⁷⁵ From there, the supplies are distributed throughout South and Central America via smaller cargo airplanes. Using the unique Air Force C-27s (a smaller version of the C-130), Soto Cano has become an intricate center for "hub and spoke" operations. This simply means that Soto Cano serves, along with Howard AFB, as a logistics hub, basing supply stocks in storage and distributing them throughout the region (spokes) using the C-27s. This allows the C-27s to refuel at Soto Cano and carry more payload because of the shorter delivery distance, which translates to a savings of time and money.

Option 2: If JTF-B leaves Soto Cano, there are other means to execute the hub and spoke mission of the C-27s. First, the hub and spoke mission can be performed from Howard AFB, Panama, flying directly to delivery sites.⁷⁶ This is already done to some extent, although Soto Cano provides valuable refueling for longer and heavier loads (i.e., Belize or Guatemala). Country MilGPs would

⁷⁵ There is one C-5 a week (from Charleston AFB, S.C.) that lands at Soto Cano on its way to Panama. This aircraft bring supplies, but most of the JTF-B resupply comes up from Panama, dropped off by transports that fly direct to Howard AFB, Panama, bypassing Soto Cano.

⁷⁶ Telephone Interview with LtCol David G. Bradford, Plans and Programs Director. Howard AFB, Panama. 14 January 1994.

be responsible for coordinating the distribution of supplies within the country.⁷⁷ Another option is to move the regional hub to the international airport in the northern Honduran city of San Pedro Sula, the second largest city in Honduras. USSOUTHCOM could establish a small MilGP office at the airport, contract a warehouse and small security team to guard the supplies, then fly C-5s directly into San Pedro Sula. This is not an option at Toncontin airport in Tegucigalpa as the runway is not equipped for a C-5 and the airport is already overcrowded. Although this alternative would require a great deal of coordination, it is not an uncommon procedure as it used to support U.S. military organizations in South American nations.⁷⁸

Finally, the demand for logistical support has greatly decreased now that conflicts have been resolved in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Remote intelligence and radar sites in Honduras like Cerro la Mole are being integrated into the Caribbean Basin Radar Network (CBRN), thus reducing the need for a U.S. presence at these sights. Other facilities, like Tiger Island, have already been closed.⁷⁹ Although regional deployments and exercises are still a large source of logistical "business" for JTF-B, this support can be achieved without the U.S. presence (discussed in the following exercise/deployment section).

Regional Exercise/Deployment Coordination

According to Secretary of Defense William Perry, "maintaining a high state of readiness among all of the armed services is a priority for the Department." Perry defines this state of readiness as

⁷⁷ The USMilGP in Honduras is one of the largest in the region. They coordinate their own distribution of supplies, some of which are delivered directly to their office at Toncontin airport in Tegucigalpa. The U.S. Embassy in Honduras has their own system of logistical support and is not supported in any way by JTF-B.

⁷⁸ Interview with Colonel John A. Cope Jr. Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University. Ft. Leslie J. McNair: Washington D.C. February 4, 1994.

⁷⁹ JTF-B Command Briefing 1992.

"training our forces in the field."⁸⁰ The challenge of course is maintaining this high state of readiness while dramatically reducing the budget and force size.

Since 1954, over 100 joint military operations have taken place with the Honduran Armed Forces. Currently, over 25,000 soldiers a year transit through Honduras. About 13,000 to 15,000 of those are National Guard troops fulfilling their two-week-a-year training requirements.⁸¹ Honduras provides an excellent training opportunity for U.S. troops for several reasons. First, Honduran regulations are very permissive, therefore allowing great flexibility in training maneuvers. Second, Panama and Honduras are the only countries in the region that allow very large exercises, thus enabling the U.S. to train thousands of soldiers at a time. Finally, like any overseas training, the exercises provide realism to otherwise mundane skill training.

There are three main types of unit level deployments that take place in Honduras. These include Deployments for Training (DFT) and Overseas Deployments for Training (ODT). DFTs (active duty units) and ODTs (Reserve and Guard units) are small unit deployments, typically engineering or medical training missions. The second type of deployments are Security and Technical Assistance Deployments. These range in size, but are generally small unit deployments geared toward training host nation militaries in logistics or technical assistance. Finally, large scale JCS exercises include both warfighting exercises and large scale engineering projects like road building.⁸² (For further explanation of specific deployments and exercises, see Appendix C)

Option 1: JTF-B has established logistics, supply and service systems to sustain its forces and

⁸⁰ "Dod, Army budget plans to key on high readiness." Pentagram. February 11, 1994. 1, 7.

⁸¹ "Latin American Deployment Overview." National Guard Bureau Document. March, 1994.

⁸² "Soto Cano J3 Fact Sheet." Prepared for the Democratization Meeting at the NSC. February 22, 1993.

to serve as the control, communication, transportation, maintenance, and supply center for virtually all deployment activities in Honduras. JTF-B's support of DFT/ODT and JCS exercises has allowed units from all over the U.S. to train effectively and cheaply in Honduras. In the area of supply, JTF-B can provide all classes of supplies, and receives and coordinates distribution of weekly stocks to support troops in-country. JTF-B also provides most air and ground transportation out to exercise sites, alleviating the need for units to bring their own transportation. However, for large exercises where additional transportation is brought, Soto Cano provides maintenance for helicopters and trucks, stocking parts and tools. Finally, JTF-B provides all contracting for local supplies such as building materials, fruits and vegetables, and fuel. This is very valuable as third world contracting is difficult to coordinate from the United States. JTF-B provides similar support to units training in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Belize, although the support is somewhat limited when outside of Honduras. JTF-B believes that it would be impossible to execute a large exercise in Honduras without its support.

The biggest advantage of Soto Cano is that it saves other units money when they deploy for training in the region. For the National Guard, deploying new units every two weeks, the money saved by using Soto Cano services allows them to train in the region more than they might otherwise be able to afford. According to a National Guard exercise coordinator, "We have a limited number of airplanes, helicopters, and flying hours. The services provided by Soto cano save us money and allow us to use our aviation assets in other countries that don't have JTF-Bravos."⁸³

Option 2: Leaving Honduras does not mean training in Honduras must cease. The training environment in Honduras is still ideal, and given the DoD commitment to readiness of forces, it is assumed that training will continue. The GOH and the HAF will still be willing to train with the U.S. and allow exercises in the country. Joint military training was taking place long before there was ever

⁸³ Interview with Major Ed Dailey. Exercises Division, Army National Guard Bureau Headquarters. Washington D.C. February 15, 1994.

a JTF-B.⁸⁴

Other large exercises are done in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility without a JTF-B to coordinate operations. One such exercise, a National Guard exercise in Ecuador, has established a base coordination camp about the size of JTF-B. They have deployed nine helicopters, and brought all of their own classes of supplies, including food rations, spare parts, fuel, medical supplies and other necessities to sustain the large force for the duration of the operations. Troops were transported to the country using Air Guard C-5s, KC-135s, and C-130s (stopping in Panama to refuel).⁸⁵ The Guard deployed some members for six month periods to provide continuity to the command and control of the operations, similar to the role that the joint staff provides at Soto Cano.

Even some large scale exercises in Honduras have been virtually independent of help from JTF-B. During the 1987 General Terencio Sierra exercise in Honduras, the Missouri National Guard deployed 4,620 troops for road building. "The base camp constructed during the exercise to house troops consisted of tents erected on wooden platforms. The tents were removed when the National Guard redeployed to the United States. The mess hall and latrine facilities . . . were left for future exercises."⁸⁶ Exercise Golden Pheasant, a 14 day active duty combat exercise conducted in 1987, deployed 3,025 personnel to Honduras using 54 aircraft. They deployed 191 ground transportation vehicles, eight helicopters, 12 105-mm Howitzers, four 60mm Mortars, and two Sheridan tanks.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Telephone Interview with Capt. Jaqueline Foglia, Assistant Defense Military Naval and Air Attache. Honduran Embassy: Washington D.C. February 17, 1994.

⁸⁵ Interview with Major Ed Dailey. Exercises Division, Army National Guard Bureau Headquarters. Washington D.C. February 15, 1994.

⁸⁶ "Honduras; U.S. National Guard Construction Exercises." United States General Accounting Office Congressional Requestor. April 1987. 7-8.

⁸⁷ "Honduran Deployment; Controls Over U.S. Military Equipment and Supplies." United States General Accounting Office Congressional Requestor. September 1988. 7, 18, 19.

Beyond this, the units brought with them ammunition, spare parts, explosives, medical supplies, and food rations. They received only "limited support" from JTF-B in the form of fuel, water, and fresh fruits.⁸⁸

Contracting is also possible without JTF-B. In Guatemala, Belize, Ecuador, and Costa Rica, the National Guard usually sends a liaison officer down to the Embassy several months in advance of a deployment. In Ecuador, this officer coordinated the terms of the deployment with the Ecuadorian government, arranged contracting for fuel and food, coordinated with the USMilGP, and surveyed the base camp site.⁸⁹ The National Guard also prepositions engineering equipment, called TEAMS, at Ft. Kobbe, Panama. Elements of this equipment are being used to support operations in Belize, Costa Rica, and Ecuador this year. The rest of the needed equipment is airlifted in at the front end of an exercise, used by the different rotational troops, and then airlifted back out once the exercise is complete. This occurs without JTF-B support or infrastructure.⁹⁰

In Honduras specifically, part of the command, control and coordination that JTF-B does can be assumed by the USMilGP, as it is in other countries. Some coordination already takes place depending on the nature of an exercise. Also, the U.S. can ask the Honduran government to offset some of the cost of deployment since so many of the exercises benefit the country. The exercises in Belize this year required no support from JTF-B because the troops were permitted to use the barracks, mess hall, and facilities of the Belize Police Defense Forces (PDF) in Belize City.⁹¹ Without Soto Cano, training in Honduras might actually be more realistic as forces often deploy into a bare bones

⁸⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁹ Interview with Major Ed Dailey. Exercises Division, Army National Guard Bureau Headquarters. Washington D.C. February 15, 1994.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

existence when responding to contingencies. The logistical planning, coordination and execution is the most difficult part of most exercises. JTF-B's assistance may rob units of some of the most valuable aspects of deployment training.

The negative impacts of leaving Soto Cano are mostly the added expenses that units will incur as they are forced to support themselves when training in Honduras. These expenses will force reductions in training throughout the region, as Active, Reserve and Guard forces will be forced to reallocate training funds. The National Guard Bureau estimates that instead of deploying the normal 13,000 to 15,000 troops, they will only be able to support 3,500 to 4,000 a year.⁹² Also affected is the Honduran Armed Forces. According to one officer, "We will see a reduced amount of exercises by the U.S. choosing, not ours. Also, these exercises will inevitably be more focused on logistical deployments rather than skill training. We won't get as much out of them because the U.S. will be focused on logistical planning rather than exercising."⁹³

Humanitarian and Civic Assistance⁹⁴

USSOUTHCOM defines "nation assistance" as "those military deployments that provide assistance to host nations in a variety of areas that support their pressing social and infrastructure needs."⁹⁵

Option 1: Since beginning these exercises in the region, the U.S. military has succeeded in

⁹² Ibid. This estimate seems exaggerated, never-the-less, it illustrates a general reduction in the overall training in the theater.

⁹³ Telephone Interview with Capt. Jaqueline Foglia, Assistant Defense Military Naval and Air Attache. Honduran Embassy: Washington D.C. February 17, 1994.

⁹⁴ Title 10 USC, Section 401 provides the guidance for the U.S. military concerning Humanitarian and Civic Assistance Projects (HCA).

⁹⁵ David G. Bradford, LtCol and Jose A. Ciceraro, Tsgt. and William A. Ward LtCol. "MEDRETE; A Critical Part of Nation Assistance." Military Review. March, 1993. 39.

strengthening rural infrastructures through road building exercises known as *Fuertes Caminos* ("strong roads"). For example, the Yoro road in Honduras, completed in 1992, is a 45 mile farm-to-market road which now allows farmers to transport their fruits and vegetables for export. U.S. forces have built countless schools and clinics, and dug wells throughout the region. In some countries, Medical Readiness Training Exercises (MEDRETES) account for nearly fifty percent of the total medical care available. In many cases, the dental care provided (DENTRETES) is the only dental care some villagers will have for a lifetime.⁹⁶ During FY93, JTF-B supported 66 different ODT/DFT HCA deployments in which 5,558 personnel were trained and thousands of poverty stricken Central Americans were provided with schools, wells, clinics, and health care.

There are several advantages of continued nation building efforts in Honduras: deployments support the economic and social progress in Honduras; the efforts support a very successful grassroots political goodwill effort; deployments maintain a U.S. force presence and influence in the region; and U.S. troops receive realistic training that is difficult to obtain in the United States.

U.S. laws regulate and in many cases restrict certain types of training in the United States. There is a complex set of procedures required for National Guard units to undertake Domestic Action Projects (DAP) - procedures that are not required in Latin America.⁹⁷ To build a community project, the Guard must get permission from local trade unions, advertise for a period of time to allow civilian contractors to place bids, conduct environmental impact studies, acquire liability insurance, and a number of other regulations. The underlying premise is that the U.S. military is not allowed to compete in any way with the private sector. If a unit constructs a building or builds a road in the U.S., they must tear up the project after completion of the training. Field medical training, except in

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷See "Procedures for Processing Domestic Action Projects (DAP) within the Army National Guard." Army National Guard Bureau Information Paper. February 10, 1994.

extreme circumstances, is strictly prohibited in the United States as well.

Like large scale training exercises, JTF-B supports the smaller DFT/ODT deployments in much the same way. The continued presence at Soto Cano guarantees continued humanitarian and civic assistance programs for the people of Honduras and the region.

Option 2: A common misconception is that the absence of JTF-B will likely reduce, if not eliminate all together, the HCA operations in Honduras. However, the presence of JTF-B has no direct bearing on which countries receive this aid. Countries nominate projects to U.S. Embassies, which forward requests to USSOUTHCOM for evaluation. From there, the JCS submits qualifying projects to the interagency process, which chooses, for mostly political reasons, which countries will receive which projects. JTF-B does not contribute to the decision making process and simply assists those deployments in its operating area.⁹⁸

However, like training exercises, the money no longer saved by JTF-B may result in a cut in the overall amount of DFT/ODT HCA operations in the theater. Unfortunately, organizations like USAID and the Peace Corps would not be able to fill the gap in the short term. Military HCA operations have specifically been tailored to meet needs that these groups do not.⁹⁹ For instance, instead of immunization projects (IMRETES) like the U.S. military, USAID focuses on projects aimed at lowering the infant mortality rate.¹⁰⁰ Peace Corps projects primarily focus on education programs in remote villages.¹⁰¹ Also, military aviation assets are used to deliver aid to remote areas that the Honduran government or USAID cannot reach.

⁹⁸ JTF-B Command Briefing, J5 Civil Military Operations. 1994.

⁹⁹ Interview with David Losk. Health Sector, USAID. Tegucigalpa Office. January 18, 1994.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Interviews with several Peace Corps. volunteers in Honduras. January, 1994.

Smaller DFTs and ODTs are much easier to carry out without JTF-B than large scale exercises.

The absence of JTF-B will not seriously inhibit the implementation of these HCA opportunities.

Professionalization of Honduran Military:

Reflecting the ideal of the soldier-statesman, many U.S. military officers reason that their commitment to the democratic process, their belief in the U.S. model of civilian preeminence, and the ideal of public service that dominates their lives equip them to serve as an example for the militaries in Latin America with which the U.S. military trains and interacts.

Option 1: USSOUTHCOM believes there is significance in military-military contacts. Especially in Latin America, where face to face persuasion is a cultural characteristic, the relationships that are fostered through joint training go a long way in advancing the USSOUTHCOM objective of "enhancing the roles of professional military forces in democratic societies." The day to day presence at Soto Cano make JTF-B ideal for influencing the HAF. The training that the HAF receive through joint exercises is also beneficial. Honduran troops learn a wide variety of skills from the basics of map reading to more advanced tactical and strategic planning. Most importantly, however, the HAF observe the professionalism of U.S. troops in how they respond to civilian leadership or treat their enlisted subordinates.

One criticism of the U.S. operations in Honduras is they are teaching the Honduran military to perform missions within the civil sector that even U.S. troops are prevented from doing by law in the U.S. A lot of the exercises, by their very nature, get the HAF involved in HCA programs to promote them as benefactors toward their society rather than repressors. But this has come under criticism because it keeps the civil sector weak. For example, the HAF, now very involved in infrastructure repairs, have recently purchased one of two cement companies in the country with a portion of their pension funds. It is now very difficult to find cement in Honduras, and what can be found is extremely expensive. A USSOUTHCOM strategy paper outlining the implementation of

theater objectives in the region illustrates this contradiction. In one paragraph, the paper instructs USSOUTHCOM to "influence the Host Nation militaries to divest themselves of commercial enterprises." Two lines down USSOUTHCOM is encouraged to "enhance Host Nation humanitarian assistance, civil affairs, and PSYOP capabilities."¹⁰²

Option 2: The day-to-day contact with the HAF would be partially lost if JTF-B were to leave Honduras. However, although these opportunities would be missed, there are still a variety of other avenues to influence the military. It is arguable that the Defense Attache Office (DAO) and the USMilGP have as much, perhaps more, influence with the HAF as JTF-B currently does. Officers in these units are mostly high ranking (Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels) as opposed to the predominantly company grade ranks at JTF-B. The cultural *machismo* of Latin American militaries makes rank very important in the minds of Latin American officers. Also, the DAO and USMilGP positions are much more political (both part of the Ambassador's country team), and thus provide access to the U.S. Ambassador.¹⁰³ Educational programs like the Honduran Defense University, Command and Staff College, and IMET funded programs in the U.S. like the School of the Americas, also serve to enhance the professionalism of the military.

Intelligence Collection:¹⁰⁴

During the 1980s, Honduras was a valuable platform for collecting intelligence on the FMLN in El Salvador and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Navy and Air Force Signals Intelligence (SIGINT)

¹⁰² Timothy McMahon, LtCol, and David G. Bradford, LtCol. "Strategy Paper #5 -- The Roles of Military Forces in Host Nation Democracies." USSouthCom J5, Quarry Heights, Panama. April 27, 1992.

¹⁰³ Interview with Major Clarence Stiehm. Army Defense Attache Office. U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Although this is not a formal criterion, it is important to mention intelligence collection because it has been such an important mission in the past; however, it is quickly being phased out of JTF-B operation.

aircraft were often based out of Soto Cano, as well as a large military intelligence unit. However, according to State Department intelligence analysts, "Our need for intelligence in the region has really decreased to almost nothing."¹⁰⁵ Rarely are aircraft prepositioned at Soto Cano for intelligence collection. The majority of regional collection comes from SIGINT platforms based at Howard AFB, Panama. Remaining intelligence assets, like the CBRN radar network, are maintained by civilian contract or Air Force Reserve elements, not related to JTF-B. Swan Island platforms are controlled by Atlantic Command (LANTCOM).

Stability of the Region

According to the 1993 National Military Strategy, forward presence operations "demonstrate our commitment, foster regional stability, lend credibility to our alliances, and enhance response capability." JTF-B was originally established to promote regional stability in Central America by 1) deterring Nicaraguan aggression, 2) undermining the FMLN in El Salvador and 3) strengthening the weak Honduran Armed Forces.

Option 1: The large U.S. military presence in Honduras had a definite effect on the Sandinista mindset in the 1980s. General Humberto Ortega, Chief of the Sandinista Army, was reported to be "worried about reactionary military elements in Central America, backed by the United States" and the plan to oust him using the American helicopters of Palmerola.¹⁰⁶ However, in 1994, the impact of a U.S. military presence in the region is unclear. Central America is much more stable than it was ten years ago.

What is clear is that few of the non-military programs of the 1980s were aggressively pursued.

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with analysts in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and the Bureau for Politico-Military Affairs, U.S. Department of State. Washington D.C. October 6, 1994.

¹⁰⁶ "Nicaragua has sent a protest note to the Honduran Government over an attack on three frontier posts allegedly mounted from inside Honduras." Reuter Textline: Latin American Weekly Report. October 9, 1982.

"Central American countries are struggling with the structural economic handicaps that originally fueled their instability" in the 1980s.¹⁰⁷ Regional experts warn not to underestimate the apparent stability of the region just because El Salvador has begun to implement a peace plan and President Chamorro has been elected in Nicaragua. The military dictatorship in Haiti, recent coup attempt in Venezuela and insurgency in Mexico point to a Hemisphere that is not yet secure.

It is arguable that the U.S. military presence is indirectly a source of instability itself, as the U.S. has focused on military solutions to resolve non-military problems. Jeanne Kirkpatrick argued in 1984 that the Communist foothold in Central America was a symptom of indigenous economic and social factors, rather than the source of instability in the region.¹⁰⁸ The argument goes that the American military build-up in Central America has caused an over-militarized isthmus, overrun with over 200,000 troops, spending more than \$30 a person per year on militaries.¹⁰⁹ In the case of Honduras, the military, of 24,000 troops, boasts a sophisticated fleet of F-5 fighter aircraft, supplied by the United States. In reality, the HAF can barely afford to feed the large force let alone fly high-maintenance, expensive aircraft. In 1990, the Bush Administration conceded that "the size of national forces has contributed significantly over the decade to regional insecurity."¹¹⁰

The United States has made it their policy to encourage Latin American nations to reduce the

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Farah. "The Lost Decade; Central America is staggering under its 80s legacy." Washington Post National Weekly Edition. June 14-20 1993. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick. "Doctrine of Moral Equivalence." Department of State Bulletin. August 1984.

¹⁰⁹ John Burstein. "Hope for a Stable Central America." Chicago Tribune. August 9, 1990.

¹¹⁰ John Burstein. "To Seal Peace, Stop Aiding Armies." Los Angeles Times. September 17, 1990.

size of their militaries to a level more suited to national and regional requirements.¹¹¹ Although applauding this policy, opponents of the U.S. presence in Honduras believe that "building real democratic governments in the region requires an unequivocal U.S. commitment to reduce the size of their armed forces" in the region.¹¹² Only then can real reform take place and true stability in the region be realized.

Option 2: If JTF-B leaves Soto Cano, there will not be a sudden shift toward instability in the region. Officials, particularly those in the U.S. Embassy, unanimously agree that the chances of a military coup in Honduras are small. A report by the Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict concluded that Honduras is stable, has a low-moderate risk of insurgency, and that democracy is well entrenched. In the event of an insurgency, the report concludes that the GOH could adequately handle the threat. According to one Embassy official, "Even if the threat of a coup were higher, I do not see JTF-B being the deterrent threat to prevent a takeover. It is the relationship with the United States in general that discourages instability. The HAF know the serious ramifications they would face in the event of a coup." In the region, communism is certainly no longer an option, however small leftists uprisings may still remain a problem. Once again, due to the nature of this threat, a U.S. logistical base in central Honduras will have little impact.

The presence of JTF-B is mostly a psychological security/comfort for the Hondurans. Two recent challenges to their national sovereignty, the "Soccer War" and the Nicaraguan build-up, have found them unprepared and out numbered. Still today, the Honduran military is smaller than others in Central America, particularly the militaries in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

¹¹¹ Interviews with members of the J5 Strategic Planning Staff, USSouthCom, Quarry Heights, Panama. August 1993.

¹¹² John Burstein. "To Seal Peace, Stop Aiding Armies." Los Angeles Times. September 17, 1990.

Contingency Operations

Option 1: Soto Cano serves as a valuable tool in responding to unexpected contingencies in the region. In 1992, assets from JTF-B, at the request of the Honduran government, were used to help settle 250 Haitian refugees, and in 1993 aid was delivered to flood victims in the remote region of Mosquitia. Whether it is natural disasters like a volcano erupting in Nicaragua or more traditional contingencies like Operation Just Cause, Soto Cano is prepared to support contingency operations.

Proponents of forward basing often compare Soto Cano to Lajes AB in the Azores or pre-established bases in Saudi Arabia that were used to support the massive build-up for Desert Shield/Storm. Beyond the obvious logistical advantages of a prepositioned airstrip, there is also something to be said for the day to day interaction with Host Nation militaries, making a quick integration of forces possible.

In the event of a regional contingency, it is arguable that already having an established presence in Honduras would make an operation easier. Howard AFB is 550 nautical miles from the southern border of Honduras and Guantanamo Bay is 650 miles from the northern border. It would be more difficult to conduct an operation from one of these facilities, or even MacDill AFB in Florida, than it would from a well stocked base in Honduras. Therefore, "U.S. officials say that having an open-ended foothold in Honduras is itself the best reason for staying put."¹¹³

Option 2: Leaving Honduras may increase the time between deployment and employment of contingency operations, but it will still be possible to respond should a contingency arise. During the Cold War, DoD had war plans for attacking Eastern Europe even though the U.S. military had never trained there and had no prepositioned bases directly in the region. At present, JTF-B is not even

¹¹³ John Otis. "Honduras a foothold for U.S. in region." The Washington Times. March 29, 1992.

written into any of the USSOUTHCOM contingency plans for the region.¹¹⁴ If, however, USSOUTHCOM chose to use Soto Cano in a contingency, provided the Honduran government sanctioned this, the airfield could still be used even if JTF-B were gone. According to one Honduran Official, "In the event of an emergency, the U.S. would not be allowed in under the same terms as now, with a large task force. However, they would be allowed in for a several month period, or until the crisis was over."¹¹⁵ Although the runway would not be as well maintained as it is now by the U.S., the Hondurans will keep it operational enough to continue flying commercial air transport and HAF aircraft. Local surcharges, paid mostly by the *Maquiladoras*, will help pay for this.¹¹⁶ Also, one must realize that Soto Cano is really only useful for emergencies in Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and possibly Costa Rica. All other countries in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility are too far away for Soto Cano to do much good.

Even if there is a military contingency in the region, it is no longer juxtaposed against East-West antagonisms, and therefore the chances of a U.S. military response are small. In reality, the only interest the U.S. would be willing to fight for in the Latin American theater is the Panama Canal. Should a contingency arise where the U.S. is forced to intervene in Panama, Soto Cano will most likely not be used since it was not used for Operation Just Cause in 1989.¹¹⁷ If the U.S. wishes to respond to natural disasters, it can simply deploy a temporary task force.

Panama 2000

¹¹⁴ Unclassified DoD - USSOUTHCOM cable/memorandum. May 20, 1992.

¹¹⁵ Telephone Interview with Capt. Jaqueline Foglia, Assistant Defense Military Naval and Air Attache. Honduran Embassy: Washington D.C. February 17, 1994.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Colonel John A. Cope Jr. Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University. Ft. Leslie J. McNair: Washington D.C. February 4, 1994.

Option 1: One of the most important reasons why USSOUTHCOM wishes to maintain Soto Cano is to retain the option of moving assets to Honduras as the U.S. draws down in Panama. Primarily, these include aviation assets - very important for quick response contingency operations. According to one JCS planner, "If Panama is going to stay open, then we may not need Soto Cano. Until we know for sure, I think we should hold on to Soto Cano."¹¹⁸ This statement accurately characterizes the view of many, including the current U.S. Ambassador to Honduras.¹¹⁹

The option of repositioning assets at Soto Cano is not feasible however. Unless USSOUTHCOM would do some major military construction, there is little that they could move to Soto Cano. The likelihood that Congress would authorize large military construction funds to build these facilities is slim considering that the U.S. has no basing rights agreement with the Hondurans and considering the original promise to leave Honduras once the threats in El Salvador and Nicaragua subsided.

Even with massive military construction, there is little room left for substantial asset transfers. In July 1993, an Army study was conducted to evaluate the potential for moving CH-47 helicopter assets to Soto Cano from Howard AFB. It was found that the base could accommodate only six additional helicopters, although there was only room to house four additional crews.¹²⁰ Fixed wing assets would require even more space. Moving assets to Soto Cano is further complicated by GOH plans to build an international airport terminal. The terminal would most likely be built where the 228th aviation unit is now, on the south side of the runway. Moving the 228th to another area of the

¹¹⁸ Interview with J5 staff officer, Western Hemisphere. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Pentagon, Washington D.C. February 15, 1994.

¹¹⁹ Interview with high ranking officials U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Honduras. January 14, 1994.

¹²⁰ David A. Grant, CDT Lt. USMA. "CH-47 reassignment to Soto Cano, AB Honduras." USSouthCom Study. July 1993.

base would use up most or all of the room that could be used for Panama assets. USSOUTHCOM headquarters at Quarry Heights, Panama could possibly be moved to an open field area at Soto Cano, currently used to erect tent cities during large exercises. Again, this would require a great deal of construction. Also, any of these changes to Soto Cano would require the permission of the Honduran government.

Option 2: As has already been discussed in the contingency section, a U.S. departure from Soto Cano would make it difficult, if not impossible, to later move USSOUTHCOM assets to Honduras. This would require a re-negotiation of the terms for U.S. troops in Honduras which would not be attractive politically for either nation. Thus, this criteria is irrelevant for Option 2.

Conclusion

Although Central America is a fringe priority for the United States, it is still important.¹²¹ Fundamentally, the development of democracies and free market economies in the Western Hemisphere will only serve to enhance the U.S. national security interests of the United States. Going back to the Monroe doctrine, the United States has historically had a deep concern about the events that transpire in the Caribbean and Central America. Although from different ancestries, the countries of North, Central, and South America have slowly come together, agreeing on the basic principles of democracy and free and open economies. The United States is approaching a decision point with regard to its policy in Central America. The region has changed and continues to evolve - and so must U.S. policy.

This paper has focused on a specific issue of U.S. policy in Central America - the decision to maintain a military presence in Honduras, or withdraw the troops and pursue U.S. objectives through other means. The decision essentially rests on a cost-benefit analysis, weighing the \$22 million annual

¹²¹ David G. Bradford, LtCol. "The Southern Theater: U.S. Interests Still Matter Here." Strategic Review, Winter 1994, Vol. 22, No. 1.

operating expenses of JTF-B against the benefits of the base to U.S. policy objectives and the region in general.

In the context of U.S. military expenditures, JTF-B is a very small expense. Withdrawing JTF-B from Honduras will not make a significant impact on the DoD budget. However, as stewards of the taxpayers' money, the U.S. military has an obligation to minimize wastefulness - from bullets to bases. Therefore, the \$22 million expense should not be taken lightly.

JTF-B's contributions to the country of Honduras are plentiful. The sizable influx of U.S. dollars to the Comayaguan economy is important, but is not substantial. It cannot be compared to the U.S. forces impact on the Panamanian economy (\$255 million in FY92, approximately 4.2 percent of the GDP).¹²² JTF-B employs hundreds of Hondurans, not thousands. Furthermore, the economic impact of JTF-B becomes less relevant with the growth of Chinese *Maquiladoras*, providing far more jobs and contracts than JTF-B.

The benefit of U.S. training in Honduras will not be lost with the elimination of JTF-B. U.S. troops deploy throughout Latin America without joint headquarters to assist them. Thus, U.S. troops will continue to be trained in Honduras, HCA projects that benefit Honduras will continue, and the HAF will continue to drill and learn from U.S. soldiers. It is true however, that the frequency and size of these deployments may be affected by a U.S. departure from Honduras, as individual units will have to adjust their budgets to compensate for the money that could be saved by JTF-B. However, by 1995, the U.S. Armed Forces will have dropped to 1.5 million personnel; and, although budgets have been slashed, there will be an increase in operational and maintenance funding.¹²³ Thus, fewer forces and increased budgets for training should help to compensate for money that might have been saved

¹²² Treaty Implementation Plan (TIP) Information Briefing. Albrook, AFB, Panama. August 1993.

¹²³ "DoD, Army budget plans key on high readiness." Pentagram. February 11, 1994. 1.

by JTF-B.

Perhaps the most affected by the absence of JTF-B will be the Reserve Components. Although deploying all over the world for training, the majority of engineering and medical exercises take place in Central America. These opportunities will be partially reduced if JTF-B is eliminated. However, in the larger context, the Reserve Components are less important to regional strategic considerations. The Guard was not significantly involved in Operation Just Cause and according to the JCS, the DoD does not envision ever using more than 15 National Guard brigades, of which there are currently 47 in the U.S.¹²⁴ Added to this, the National Guard and Reserve are both being sharply reduced, the Army Guard to 400,000 and the Army Reserve to 242,000, thus there are going to be fewer troops to train in the coming years.¹²⁵

Soto Cano as a forward base for contingency operations has little relevance in Central America now. Not only is the region relatively stable, but the U.S. currently lacks the political will to intervene if contingencies should arise. The one exception is of course the Panama Canal. However, should the neutrality of the Canal ever be jeopardized, Soto Cano would not be used for such a contingency as has been shown by Operation Just Cause in 1989. Counter-drug missions have lost any momentum they might have had in 1990, and intelligence collection has come to an end. Logistics coordination would not seriously be harmed if JTF-B is removed, and the chances of moving assets from Panama to Honduras are slim.

In conclusion, the analysis has shown that the costs outweigh the benefits of maintaining a presence in Honduras (see Appendix D for an evaluation matrix summarizing the conclusions). In comparing option one with option two, it is apparent that not only are many of the missions JTF-B

¹²⁴ "Pentagon Plan Would Cut 100,000 from Army Guard, Reserve Ranks." Washington Post. December 11, 1993. A12.

¹²⁵ "DoD, Army budget plans to key on high readiness." Pentagon. February 11, 1994.
1.

currently performs outdated, but many missions are possible without the support base. JTF-B's absence will not have dramatic affect on the region, nor will it severely impair the implementation of USCINCSO's objectives for the region. Furthermore, at least \$22 million dollars a year can be saved by withdrawing U.S. forces from Honduras.

JTF-B is a task force looking for a mission. The Bush administration's attempts to justify its existence with a post-Cold War counter-drug mission has failed; and the Clinton administration has declined to provide any new reasons to maintain the military presence. Certainly, there is no legitimate argument that JTF-B at Soto Cano is critical to the national security needs of the U.S. Although Soto Cano is a convenience for U.S. military operations in the region, it is little more than that. One can see USSOUTHCOM's position however. Soto Cano is another tool in the toolbox. Although they may never use it, it is nice to have it there - just in case. Unfortunately, the usefulness of the tool has become outdated and costly.

The United States has made the classic mistake in earlier decades of ignoring the problems of Central America, letting them fester until they explode in violence. This intransigence has led to policy extremes, either total neglect or military intervention. Politically, it is becoming apparent that the U.S. has possibly worn out its welcome as a permanent fixture in Honduras. This does not mean that the United States or USSOUTHCOM must discontinue the efforts to stabilize the region militarily. A withdrawal of U.S. forces from Honduras in the near future will shed the last vestiges of Cold War thinking in Central America and allow for a new direction - one that aims at fostering a region of cooperative, stable, and prosperous nations.

Appendix A: Acronyms and Abbreviations

AB	Air Base
AOR	Area of Responsibility
BRAC	Base Reduction and Consolidation
CD	Counter-Drug
CONUS	Continental United States
DAO	Defense Attache Office
DAP	Domestic Action Project
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DENTRETE	Dental Readiness Exercise Training
DFT	Deployment for Training
DoD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
GOH	Government of Honduras
HAF	Honduran Armed Forces
HCA	Humanitarian and Civil Assistance
IMET	International Military Education Training
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JTF-B	Joint Task Force - Bravo
LANTCOM	Atlantic Command
MEDRETE	Medical Readiness Training Exercise
MILCON	Military Construction
MILGP	U.S. Military Group
ODT	Overseas Deployment Training
PCC	Policy Coordinating Committee
SAR	Search, Air, and Rescue
SCAB	Soto Cano Air Base
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
TDY	Temporary Duty
USARSO	United States Army South
USCINCSO	United States Commander-in-Chief South
USSOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command

Appendix B - Summary of Security Assistance to Honduras

(in millions of dollars)

<u>Source/FY</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>88</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>
FMS	8.4	19	9						31.9					
FMP									20.2		5.0	1.5		
MAP		11	27.5	40	61.3	60.1	60	40	40					
Supp				36.5	5.0									
RMTC				6.5				0.72						
506A						20.0								
IMET	.7	1.3	.8	1.0	1.2	1.04	1.20	1.22	1.25	1.10	1.57	1.25	1.34	.5
Tot	9.1	31.3	37.3	84.7	67.5	81.1	61.2	41.2	41.3	21.5	33.5	6.25	2.8	.5
				< peak in aid >									<current>	
FY	<u>81</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>88</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>

* Source of Information: USMilGP: Tegucigalpa, Honduras. 1994.

Appendix C: Summary of U.S. Training in Honduras

Title 10 USC, Section 401 - HCA Assistance Projects:

- Medical, dental, and veterinary care
- Construction of Rudimentary Surface Transportation Systems
- Well Drilling and Construction of Basic Sanitation Facilities
- Rudimentary Construction and Repair of Public Facilities

ODT/DFTs in Honduras:

In FY93, 66 exercises were completed, training 5,558 personnel.

In FY94, 63 exercises are planned, training 3,410 personnel.

Projects include: schools, health clinics, wells, latrines, church repairs, sports facilities, roads and culverts, and airfield repair.

Major Exercises Planned/Executed in FY94:

Ellipse Echo: A combined/joint FTX/CPX conducted every three years. Participants are USSouthCom, and Host Nation Forces. Involves full interagency participation with a total of 600-700 DoD and interagency personnel.

Task Force Eagle: A Tactical ODT from the Oklahoma, Illinois, and New York Army National Guard. Mission is to deploy and conduct tactical training at Tamara/Zambrano in the Department of San Francisco Morazan. A Host Nation Platoon is in every training cycle. Involves 1,540 personnel.

King's Guard: A series of combined/joint naval specwar CPX/FTX consisting of maritime surveillance and interdiction exercises. Participants included U.S. forces, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Involves 50 personnel

Fuerzas Unidas: A Combined/Joint CPX using victors computer simulation conducted in Tegucigalpa by the Honduran Command and General Staff College. Participants included U.S. Forces, Honduras, and El Salvador. Involved 100 personnel.

Fuertes Caminos: A number of road building exercises are planned for Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize this year. Although none are taking place in Honduras, JTF-B is involved in the support of these exercises.

*Source: JTF-B Command Briefing 1994.

Appendix D: Evaluation Matrix

Criteria/Options	Option 1 - Status Quo	Option 2 - Leave
COSTS:		
Operating Costs	(-)	(+)
Future Increases	(-)	(+)
Deployment Costs	(+)	(-)
ECONOMIC IMPACT	(+)	(+)
POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS:		
U.S. Government	(-)	(+)
Honduran Government	(+/-)	(+/-)
U.S./GOH Relations	(+)	(+)
REGIONAL OBJECTIVES:		
Counter-drug missions	(-)	(-)
Logistics Coordination	(+)	(+)
Regional Training	(+)	(+)
HCA operations	(+)	(+)
Professionalization of HAF	(+)	(+)
Intelligence Collection	(-)	(-)
Contingency Operations	(+)	(-)
Panama 2000	(-)	(-)
Stability of Region	(-)	(+)